

Year-Around Swims in the Bay

Their Fountain of Youth

By Mel Ziegler

San Francisco Bay mesmerizes none like it does its handful of year-round swimmers, who claim to find youth, health and a mystical experience in its chilly waters.

They swim in water temperatures ranging from 47 to 63 degrees, mostly in the cove off Aquatic Park, where there are several private clubs and a handsome expanse of beach.

They are cops, firemen, bankers, investors, bartenders, long-shoremen, doctors, teamsters and executives, mostly 60 years old and up. They are as buoyant as the water they swim in, and they act as if they'll live forever, which some of them appear to be doing.

Ask them if they've found the mythical Fountain of Youth and they boom: "Absolutely!"

Many claim to catch colds when they stop swimming and there are several who can't even remember the last time they saw a doctor.

"There's just got to be something in that bay we don't know about," says swimmer Frank Mennucci, a 64-year-old retired tavern owner. "It's medicine, that water, I tell you. Something unbelievable."

Mennucci swims the three-quarter-mile cove daily along with other members of the Dolphin and South End Rowing Clubs. There are:

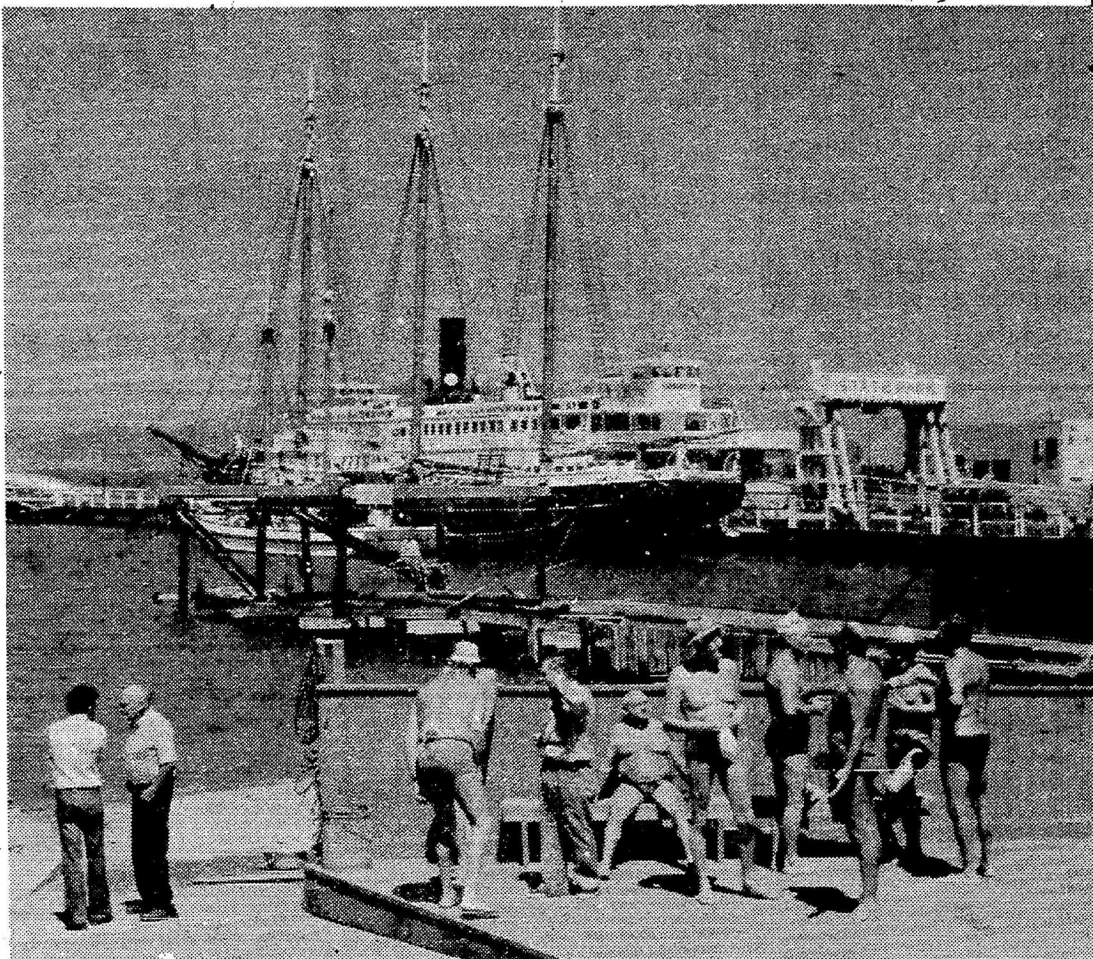
Dan Murphy, 65-year-old retired investor, who's had so many kidney operations he now swims before the sutures are removed.

Tom Dougherty, 35, a motorcycle cop who was given up for dead after an accident dislocated a hip and caused three compound fractures.

Hiroshi (Hero) Tsuyumine, 56, who had a malignant tumor "the size of a grapefruit" removed from his stomach.

Jack O'Leary, 61-year-old retired Teamster, who has had three spinal fusions.

Their stories are enough to make a faith healer envious. Swim-



Standing on the deck of the Dolphin Club, swimmers talked over the delights of a dip in the bay

ming, they say, keeps them out of wheelchairs, rocking chairs, all chairs. Swimming in the bay, that is.

"Swimming is one thing, but swimming here is something else," says retired professor Bill Greer, 71. "The bay—and moderation—keep me young."

What the bay does for the body, it apparently also does for the mind—maybe even more so. Gordon Cook, a noted artist who is president of the Dolphin Club, regards his swimming as a spiritual experience, "distinctly a form of meditation."

Cook and other swimmers say they have experienced hallucinations more grand than those any drug could induce.

"My sense of it," says Cook, "is that the city and the Bay Area, for all their faults and virtues, comprise a magic ring in the world, a ring that runs in concentric circles until the final, smallest circle is centered in the water directly below the north tower of the Golden Gate Bridge, the deepest spot in the channel."

It is Cook's feeling—he is extremely reticent discussing it—that all bay swimmers, knowing it or

not, are embraced by the mystical effects.

"Swimming in the bay is complete freedom," agrees investor Dave Hinton, 45. "It massages and activates the entire body, and when you come out of that water, it feels like you just had ten cocktails."

"I know guys who fall asleep in there and don't wake up till they hit the beach," he said.

Others find it "a tonic." One insurance man says, "It's great for the nerves. I come down here with a lot of problems, but then when I'm out there, all alone, everything fits into its proper perspective."